

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Hib Vaccine

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 150 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02111

What is Hib?

Hib is a germ that can cause severe or fatal diseases, most often in young children. In children, Hib is the leading cause of meningitis. This is a disease that results in swelling around the brain and spinal cord. Hib can cause swelling in the airway that can block the passage to the lungs and lead to suffocation. Hib can infect the lungs, blood, joints, bones and the thin membrane that covers the heart. Before the newest vaccines were used in the United States, about one of every 200 children younger than 5 caught a severe disease caused by Hib.

How bad are these infections?

Each year, about 12,000 children in the U.S. get meningitis from Hib. About 600 children die from the swelling and 3,000 have lasting brain damage. Other Hib diseases kill up to one of every 20 children who have them.

Are some children more likely to get Hib?

Black, Latino and Native American children are at higher risk of getting Hib diseases. Poor children, children with sickle cell anemia or a weakened immune system, and children who do not have a spleen also are at higher risk for Hib. Children younger than 6 who attend day care seem to be at higher risk, too. Hib is most common in infants, but nearly half the cases occur in children age 18 months or older.

How can you protect your child from Hib?

Hib vaccine can prevent most of these diseases in children. All infants should get a series of four Hib vaccine shots starting when they are 2 months old. The rest of the shots are given at 4, 6 and 15 months. There are different schedules for babies between 7 and 15 months old who missed the shots when they were younger. Children older than 15 months need only one dose.

How well does this vaccine work?

Nearly all children from 2 months to 5 years old who receive Hib vaccine will be protected against the severe Hib diseases that can cause permanent damage and even death. Before 1991, about 100 children younger than 5 years old got Hib each year and some of them died. In 1991, the year the state began urging parents to have their children vaccinated against Hib, fewer than 30 children younger than 5 years old got severe Hib disease and none died. If every child gets Hib vaccine starting at 2 months, even fewer people would get these diseases.

Is the Hib vaccine safe?

Yes, it is safe for most people, but like any vaccine it can sometimes cause mild side effects. About one of every 10 children who get Hib vaccine will have a little redness or swelling where the shot was given. Less than one in 100 will run a fever of 102° F or higher. These reactions are not serious and usually go away in a few days. More severe reactions can happen, but they are rare.

How can you get Hib vaccine for your child?

Your doctor, nurse, or health clinic can vaccinate your child.

Where can you learn more about Hib?

Your doctor, nurse or health center

Your local board of health

Listed in the phone book under local government

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Immunization Program Main Office (617) 522-3700, x420

Boston Immunization Office (617) 534-5608

Central Regional Health Office, West Boylston (508) 792-7880

Northeast Regional Health Office, Tewksbury (617) 851-7261

Southeast Regional Health Office, Lakeville (617) 947-1231

Western Regional Health Office, Amherst (413) 545-6600

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